



Region 3  
1400 South 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Bozeman, MT 59718

**Environmental Assessment Decision Notice**  
For Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park  
Proposed Group Bicycle Campsite, Shade Shelter and Concession Remodel

**Description of Proposed Action:**

Group Bicycle Campsite. In order to address increasing demand to accommodate touring bicyclists and support tourism, MSP proposes to construct a new group bicycle campsite. The campsite would be located adjacent to previously developed areas within the park.

Because this will be a shared group site that does not require space for vehicle or camper parking, camping fees would be lower than standard campsite fees. Shared group bicycle campsite would be available on a first-come, first-served basis. While these sites would be designed specifically for bicyclists, the sites may also appeal to other non-motorized users, such as hikers or campers arriving by human- powered watercraft, such as kayaks.

The Park has enough space for a group bicycle campsite with an area of 2,500 to 5,000 square feet. The site will include four 12'x14' raised tent pads, two bicycle racks, one freezeproof yard hydrant, one prefabricated metal fire ring with grill and one 10'x12' shelter on a 16'x20' concrete pad with picnic table and 110V-20A weatherproof outlet with bicycle clamp. This group site is modeled after the sites installed at Placid Lake and Salmon Lake State Parks in 2018.

Electricity at the group site would be provided for a variety of purposes, such as charging devices or security lighting. The water hydrant will be located where the water supply is located reasonably close to the proposed shared group bicycle campsite and substantial construction, such as pavement removal, would not be required. Nearby trails may be improved or constructed to connect the shared group bicycle campsite to existing facilities at the park.

Shade Shelter. Since the inception of the Paradise Tours in 2017, the park has seen a steady increase in the number of visitors partaking in this more accessible tour. The park has received positive feedback at developing a tour where those who may be physically challenged are still able to experience the amazing sites in the caverns. The park has also



found, that by allowing very young children the opportunity for this shorter tour, there can be less damage to the cave resources and the nesting bats.

To protect those waiting for their tour to begin, the proposed shelter will be designed to consider late morning to late afternoon sun while not blocking the view from the site.

Architectural design will complement the existing cave visitor center patio and not be too obtrusive on the viewshed from the cave visitor center. There will be adequate room to negotiate a t-turn in the access cart. The existing asphalt should be protected, perhaps with bedding sand, during construction. After construction, the entire asphalt area should be patched, and slurry sealed to provide continuity.

Renovation of the Concession Building. The concessions building is located adjacent to the upper cave visitor center parking lot. Prior to the park contracting with a concessionaire, park cave tour visitation was 44,612 tours in 2004 and 43,705 tours in 2005. Comparing this to current cave tour visitation with concessions available, of 59,537 tours in 2017 and 63,035 tours in 2018, shows an average increase of 43 percent. These numbers indicate having concessions available resulted in increased park revenue and provided some amenities that are asked for and enjoyed by park visitors.

In order to begin to address the increase in visitors and their increased demand for an additional variety of concessions, proposed work to be done include the following: relocate the HVAC system, build exterior kitchen shell (120 sq. ft. expansion), rebuild stairs to the second floor, new roof on kitchen shell, new siding on kitchen shell and undertake electrical and code upgrades as required.

Lewis & Clark Caverns is within a National Register Historic District (24JF2033). Based on review of proposed plan and a site visit, the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has concurred that this renovation will not impact the integrity or feel of the building and are not visible from the main (front) building elevation.

#### **Public Process and Comments:**

The public was notified from August 9 through September 13, 2019, in the following manner to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:


- Two public notices will be published in the Helena Independent Record, Bozeman Chronicle, Butte Montana Standard and the Whitehall Ledger;
- One statewide press release;
- Public notice on the Montana State Parks web page: <http://stateparks.mt.gov/>; and
- Notification to the National Speleological Society, Northern Rocky Mountain Grotto and the National Cave Association.


**Public Comments:**

Sixteen (16) public comments were received on the proposed action. All sixteen were in support of the bike camps, shade shelter and concession remodel.

**Decision:**

Based on the environmental review and the support from the public received through public comment, it is my decision to approve Montana FWP's proposed action as stated in the environmental assessment: The construction of a group bicycle campsite, the installation of a shade shelter at the cave entrance for the Paradise tours, and the 120 square foot expansion of the Concession building kitchen.

  
Betsey LaBroad, Region 3 Park Manager

  
Date